

Sooner or Later

Chapter 2 of ??

by Lynne C. (www.geocities.com/fic_girl_2003/index.html)

Rating: PG-13

Disclaimer: It's all Joss' – I worship at the altar of his genius, and acknowledge that he owns all these folks and everything that they do and say.

Setting/Spoilers: during *Shells* (AtS 5.16)

Summary: Spike figured Andrew couldn't keep the secret of his return, but hasn't been able to do anything about it.

Acknowledgements: Dialogue from *Shells* comes from BuffyWorld.com
(www.buffyworld.com/angel/season5/transcripts/5x16_tran.php)

~ Interlude ~

Bloody ironic. Story of m'life. Resolve not to get on that boat for one girl, and end up gettin' on a plane for another. And to be only a time zone away from her...

Spike opened his eyes as the steward returned with what he hoped was every drop of alcohol on the plane. He'd asked for a bottle of Jack Daniels as soon as they were in the air, foolishly assuming that it would be the real thing, not some cruel joke of a bottle that would fit inside a cigarette pack with room to spare. He'd just stared at the fellow, certain that he couldn't be serious. But serious he was, so Spike had sent him off to go get the rest of the stash.

Now, he lined up these little toy soldiers, with the intent of knocking them down as quickly as possible. With their help, he might just be able to sleep away the rest of the flight. It turned out that the takeoff was the worst part. He'd sat braced and tense in the luxurious confines of his leather seat as the engines roared, and they gained speed, and finally nosed up into the air, spiraling slowly upwards before heading back out over the Atlantic. He could see enjoying the whole process, if he was in control of it – flying featured his favorite elements of speed and power, with a certain inherent danger thrown in for good measure. But as a passive participant, he wasn't in any hurry to repeat the performance.

So, passenger planes – not his favorite thing. But since they'd reached cruising altitude, he'd moved past his concern about plummeting from many thousand feet into the waters below, and had been sitting with his eyes shut, trying to pretend that this was not one of the suckier days of his post-life. And not sucky in a warm-arterial-blood kind of way.

Rather, in the couldn't-save-the-girl-again kind of way.

And, also, in the going-further-away-from-instead-of-closer-to-his-heart's-desire kind of way.

Now, he quickly poured one bottle after another down his throat, waiting for the welcome burn of the alcohol to overpower the ache that seemed to have taken out a lease in his chest cavity. Bottles one through four just made him curse the inconvenience of having to stop swallowing in order to set one down and pick another one up. Downing bottles five and six, he recalled the cute, ridiculous noise of dislike that Buffy made with each swallow of whiskey the night he took her to kitten poker. *Damned, bloody, cute girl noise!!* Bottles seven through nine were dedicated to thinking about **not** thinking about Buffy or Fred...or Dawn...or Tara...or anyone else he'd let down or otherwise couldn't manage to protect.

By bottle eleven, he was just bored with the whole process.

“Can’t even get drunk!”

It was the first either Spike or Angel had said aloud to one another in an hour or more. In the car back to the airport...sitting on the tarmac...through the beginning of the flight...they’d both maintained a stony silence, save for when it was utterly necessary give directions to those around them. Like, to order booze. Very necessary. At least, it had seemed like it. But now....

“Why would anyone ever make a bottle this small?” He held it up in front of himself, pondering the true evil of the mind that had conceived such a thing. “It’s inhuman.”

He spared a glance in Angel’s direction, noting the characteristically broody set to the shoulders. He could almost hear the wrinkles in the acres-wide forehead. And he offered up the only consolation that he could conjure, hoping that perhaps if he said the words aloud, he’d find they didn’t ring as hollow as they did in his head. “Thousands would have died if we’d saved her.”

“Yeah.” *Thus speaks the monosyllabic one...and, no, it didn’t sound any better out loud.*

He tried again, though. “She wouldn’t have wanted that.” This much he knew to be true, without question.

“Yeah.” Angel exhaled deeply before continuing, “I tried calling Wes. There was no answer.”

Spike hadn’t realized he’d still been holding onto a thread of hope for Fred’s survival until he felt it go slack. *Damn!* “I guess she’s gone, then.” *So goddamnedfucking unfair!*

His gaze fell back on his vain attempt to escape that reality. “It’s like a bloody tease,” he ranted, holding bottle number twelve up. “It’s like, ‘Here’s what a bottle of Jack would look like if you actually had one,’ or,” he held it away at arms length, and regarded it through the spyglass of his other hand, “‘here’s a drink, but it’s very far away.’ ”

“What does that mean? Really?”

What’s he mean, “what does that mean??” “It’s a play on perspective,” he explained, with a bit of exaggerated patience, holding the bottle up and wagging it for Angel to see.

“Gone. What does it mean that she’s gone?”

“Well, in the world of men, a person dies, they stay that way.”

“Unless you’re a vampire.”

“Or the ghost of one that saved the world.”

“Or Buffy. Death doesn’t have to be the end, not in our world. Rules can be broken. All you have to do... is push hard enough.”

They lapsed back into silence, Spike cursing to himself all over again. Having hope was probably the only thing worse than not having it. Angel’s inescapable, counter-intuitive logic had made that little thread spring taut again. *No doubt to be dashed all over later*, Spike mused. *Isn’t that how it generally works? Sooner or later, the inevitable disappointment....* But on further reflection, he could admit that he’d always been a slave to that hope, and wasn’t likely to change. He even used to revel in his own dogged determination to maintain that sliver of an

inkling of a dream, no matter how impossible its fulfillment. So, he'd hope, and follow any last possibility until it was, at last, well and truly obliterated, because he really couldn't do anything else.

That acknowledgement brought a certain fatalistic peace with it. Spike closed his eyes, and sleep flitted about the edges of his consciousness, though his mind wandered for some time before it claimed him. When he awoke on their arrival at LAX, he couldn't remember much of the ground that he'd mentally meandered -- an image here, a memory there. But hope, however ill-fated, had forged an idea, one that he remembered very clearly.

It wasn't anything that he could act on today. But, eventually, Angel would turn his back on that cellphone of his, and Spike would capitalize on the opportunity to examine the numbers in the speed dial – check and see if any of them were international – say, to Italy! Nope, not today, but sooner or later...

~/~

*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time
~ **Macbeth***

To be continued?

Yep, I expect. I don't know exactly how, yet. It depends upon what the Big Man contrives over the rest of the season. I'll decide sooner or later, but not today...

~ Lynne C. ~